
ONE LITTLE WORD**Sermon for the 1st Sunday in Lent, 2022****Luke 4:1-13**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is our Gospel we just heard read, Luke 4:1-13: **Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² where the Devil continued to tempt Him for forty days. He ate nothing during those days and, when they were over, He was very hungry.**

³ The Devil said to Him, “If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread!”

⁴ Jesus answered him, “Scripture has said, ‘A person will not live by bread alone.’”

⁵ The Devil took Him up and, in a moment, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶ The Devil told Him, “I shall give You all this authority and glory, because it has been given to me, and I give it to anyone to whom I please. ⁷ So, if You worship me, all this will be Yours.”

⁸ Jesus answered him, “Scripture has said, ‘Worship the Lord, your God, and serve Him only!’”

⁹ The Devil took Him into Jerusalem and had Him stand on the summit of the Temple. The Devil told Him, “If You are the Son of God, jump down from here! ¹⁰ For Scripture has said: ‘He will order His angels about you, to watch over you carefully. ¹¹ They will carry you in their hands and never let you stub your foot against a stone.’”

¹² Jesus answered him, “Scripture has said, ‘You shall not put the Lord, your God, to a test!’”

¹³ When the Devil had finished every way of tempting Him, he left Him until another opportunity would present itself.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The temptation of Jesus had occurred early in His ministry. In fact, it had happened *before* Jesus began His public preaching and teaching. It was

immediately after His baptism that **“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, ² where the Devil continued to tempt Him for forty days. He ate nothing during those days and, when they were over, He was very hungry.”**

Out there in the wilderness, Jesus had replayed the experience of ancient Israel when they had wandered in the wilderness for forty years. Jesus is, in a sense, Israel reduced to one, the One true and representative Israelite - the One who gets it right. While Israel had wandered in the wilderness for those forty years, they were tempted to grumble and complain, giving in to temptation all too often. They had grumbled and complained about the difficult journey God was making for them. They had grumbled and complained about the quality of the food that God was giving them, the manna. But at least they had something to eat! *Jesus had nothing*. Notice that Jesus, too, was being tempted by the Devil for a time of forty, forty days. But Jesus is the one faithful Israelite *who did not grumble or complain*.

Jesus is true man, with a real body, and so naturally, this prolonged fast had made Him very hungry. This is when the Devil strikes. He says to Jesus, **“If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread!”**

With that little word, “if,” the Devil did not deny that Jesus was indeed the Son of God. That Jesus is God’s Son has already been established. At Jesus’ baptism, just before this temptation, the voice of the Father had come from heaven saying, *“You are My Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with You”* (Luke 3:22). And as if to underscore the point, Luke chose the place in his book right between the baptism and the temptation to put in a genealogy of Jesus that goes all the way back to the beginning of Genesis: *“the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God”* (Luke 3:38). So now, when we come to the temptation, we know that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus knows it, so does the Devil. He did not deny that Jesus is God’s Son; he’s just using that as his set-up for what follows.

The Devil’s temptation lies in what he wants Jesus to do with the fact that He is God’s Son, what he wants Jesus to make of it, given His current circumstances. **“If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread!”** Notice the subtleness of the temptation: *“So God says You’re His Son, does He? That’s what He said at your baptism. ‘You are My Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with You.’ Well, if You’re so loved, then why has God sent You out here into this God-forsaken wilderness? Why is He letting You go hungry like this? What kind of ‘loving’ is this? Doesn’t God’s Son deserve better than this?”*

That's how the Devil operates, kind of from the side, usually not head-on. The Devil also wants us to doubt that God really cares about us. He wants us to get the wrong idea about God. He wants us to believe that God is some mean old grouch who's holding out on us and wanting to spoil our fun. That's how the Devil had worked on Adam and Eve.

Come to think of it, Jesus is replaying their temptation, too. As was just mentioned, in the verses right before the temptation account, Luke traces Jesus' ancestry all the way back to Adam. So maybe he wants us to have that episode in mind and make the comparison between Adam and Jesus. Jesus as the one true and representative Man, the second Adam, the One who overcomes the Devil and gets it right.

We can see some parallels between the two accounts. Adam was in a garden. Jesus is in a wilderness. The Devil comes at Adam and Eve somewhat indirectly, wanting them to doubt God's goodness, coming to them through food, something to eat. *"You know that tree there, the one God told you not to eat from? Why would He do that? Why would He tell you not to eat from it? I mean, it looks like a perfectly good tree. And didn't God put you in charge of this place? That's a pretty high responsibility. If God thinks that highly of you, then why would He not let you eat from this one tree? You know, I think I know what it must be: God is holding out on you. He doesn't really care about you. Now, look at that fruit there. Doesn't it look good? Go on; you know you want it. Come on, take matters into your own hands. Go for it!"*

Does this sort of approach sound familiar? Often the Devil will whisper in our ears just like this. This is his standard way of operating. His desire is for us to doubt God's goodness and His Word. He urges us to our own God, to make our own decisions about what's right for us. We can have it; we deserve it. It's what we want. Go and get it. The temptation is always to be your own God, independent of that mean old man in the sky who wants to spoil all the fun.

Adam and Eve fell for that temptation - and what a fall it was! The curse fell, and death came into the world. *"For you are dust and you will return to dust"* (Genesis 3:19). Death comes down to us. But Jesus has come to reverse that curse, to do something about the sin and the death and all the misery that comes in its wake. So here at the temptation, the Devil wants to stop Jesus before He gets started. The Devil tries the same approach with Jesus that worked before with Adam: *"God doesn't care about You. You're hungry. You're entitled. You can do*

*something about it. Go for it. **If You are the Son of God, tell this stone to become a loaf of bread!***

The Devil's temptation starts with one little word, "if." It's the little word that sets up the big trap to follow. If God cares about any of us, then why is He letting you suffer like this? If God loves you, then why is your life so miserable? Why are you struggling with so many issues? Maybe He doesn't love you. Or another "if": If God forgives sins, then why not go ahead and sin some more, since God will forgive you anyway?

You see, there's always a tiny grain of truth in the Devil's set-up, but then he twists it and uses it to lead us off in the wrong direction.

Well, to the Devil's little word, "if," Jesus has a little word of His own: **"Scripture has said."** Jesus doesn't entertain the Devil's temptation; instead, He stops it cold in its tracks. **"Scripture has said."** It stands written, and we can take our stand on it. God's Word is a sure thing, a solid footing. God has spoken. His Word is true. Don't listen to the Devil's lies and half-truths. Instead, shut him up and shoot him down. Do so with the reliable and trustworthy Word of God. **"Scripture has said."**

"A person will not live by bread alone", Jesus answers the Devil. There is more to life than just serving your belly and satisfying your own desires. Just satisfying the desires of your flesh, independent of God's Word and will - that would be to fall into the Devil's trap. Thankfully, Jesus doesn't fall for it.

Of course, we too often do. That is why Jesus came. He came into this world to do what we don't do, what we so often fail at. Jesus is our Representative, our stand-in, our Champion going out to do battle for us. Jesus does what we don't. He refuses temptation, stopping it cold in its tracks. Finally, here is a Man who will say no to the Devil! Adam didn't. We don't. *Jesus does*.

This is why it is so absolutely vital and necessary that Jesus refuses to be tempted so as not to get diverted from what He has to do. You see, Jesus has come to reverse the curse of sin and death, and the Devil wants to keep Him from doing that. Jesus has come to save us. The Devil doesn't want that to happen. He'll do anything to keep Jesus from accomplishing His mission. So the Devil plays on Jesus' status as God's Son in order to get Him to use His sonship to serve His own desires. The Devil tempts Jesus with all the kingdoms of the world - which Jesus is entitled to and will end up getting eventually. But the Devil offers Him a much easier path to get them rather than the hard road of the cross. The temptation

doesn't work. Jesus answers him, "**Scripture has said.**" The Devil tempts Jesus with the offer of quick success and power and popularity. "***If You are the Son of God, jump down from here! Throw Yourself off the temple where everybody can see You, and they will surely acclaim You as the Messiah - which is what You want, isn't it? God will surely protect You. After all, You are His Son.***" "**If You are the Son of God.**" There's that little "if" again. But Jesus has a little word of His own: "**Scripture has said.**"

Jesus will not be deterred or diverted from the road He has taken, the way of the cross. For that is the only way Jesus could accomplish His mission and save sinful mankind - to save us. There were no shortcuts or sidesteps, or easy ways out. Straight ahead, full speed ahead - that was the way for Jesus. He went to battle with the Devil as our divine Champion. And He won! Now He gives us a share in His victory. Jesus would let nothing stop Him from doing what He had set out to do, which is to go to the cross, to carry our sins on His back - that sinless back that would endure flogging and beating for our sake. Jesus was faithful to His Father's mission. This is the good news today from the story of Jesus' temptation. Nothing would stop our Saviour from reaching His goal!

And reach it He did! All our sins are paid for by virtue of God's own Son dying for them in our place. The curse of death that comes from sin has indeed been reversed, as Jesus' resurrection proves. Our enemy, the Devil, has been defeated. Now, when he comes at us with his temptations, we can say, "*Take it up with Jesus, Devil! He is my Champion. He stopped you in the wilderness, He has defeated you on the cross, and He will stop you - and stomp on you - here and now.*" And at those times of temptation, we also cry out to Jesus: "*Help me, Lord! You are stronger than I am! I'll take my stand on your completed work. God's Word is sure. Help me to say with You, Lord, 'Scripture has said.'*"

The Devil comes at us with his little word, "if," twisting and turning the truth, planting doubt and leading us astray. But Jesus comes out on the field of battle as our Champion, and He comes with a little word of His own, "**Scripture has said.**" Because Christ would not be diverted from going to the cross, you and I can take our stand with our Champion, Jesus, confident in His strength and victory - victory over sin, death, the Devil, and yes, even over temptation. As we just sang, "*One little word can fell him.*" It can, and it has. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Almighty God, heavenly Father, since every good gift comes from You, we approach You in prayer in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ our Saviour. Though we are ashamed because we are unworthy, we come with faith and confidence in Your fatherly love and mercy.

We thank You that You have given us Jesus Christ as our high priest. He knows our weaknesses, for He bore them. He knows our temptations, for He endured them, and learnt obedience by what He suffered. Grant that we may show our loyalty to You by absolute loyalty to all Your words, even when they seem baffling.

Lamb of God, slain for the sins of the world, cleanse us from our sins, and teach us obedience. Take away from us all desire to follow any will but Yours. Fill us with faith and love, that we may gladly believe and follow Your Word. Give us such trust in our heavenly Father's protection that we always rejoice as we walk in His ways.

Holy Spirit of God, when we are led into the wilderness of testing, deliver us by Your power, and save us from the evil on every hand. Give us Your strength, and by the example of Jesus show us the victorious power of God's Word.

Strengthen and bless Your Church. We praise You for the privilege of being co-workers with You to save people. Help us not to waste the grace of God that we ourselves have already received. Open the door of opportunity for us. Fill us with a faith that claims Your grace each day and then moves us to proclaim it to others. Because Your Gospel can make many people rich, give us joy in our witnessing, no matter what sacrifices we suffer.

Uphold our homes by the Gospel. Empower all parents to be true followers of Jesus, the light of the world, so that their example of faith and obedience may help their children also to know and follow Jesus.

Pour out Your Spirit on our country, O Lord, so that in their life and work all citizens may seek to show forth Your praise, power, and glory.

Be with all those who suffer, and let them know Your concern and compassion. Be with those who grieve, and comfort them with Your promises. Be with those whose earthly pilgrimage is coming to an end, and fill them with the sure hope of eternal life in Christ.

Be with all those who are suffering the terrible effects of the recent flood. We thank You for the emergency services and all who are helping in serving their neighbour.

O Father, watch over all Your people, and bring us safely through this world to the kingdom that You have prepared for all who love You. We pray all these things in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

¹ “When you enter the land that the LORD, your God, is giving you as an inheritance and you take possession of it and live in it, ² you shall take some of the first from all the produce of the ground, which you will harvest from your land, which the LORD, your God, is giving you! You shall put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD, your God, will choose to make His name dwell! ³ You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and tell him, ‘I declare today to the LORD, your God, that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our forefathers to give us!’ ⁴ Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD, your God! ⁵ You shall make this response before the LORD, your God: ‘My forefather was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with few people and lived as a foreigner there. There he

became a great, powerful and numerous nation. ⁶ However, the Egyptians treated us harshly, oppressed us and imposed severe forced labour on us. ⁷ Then we cried to the LORD, the God of our forefathers, and the LORD heard our cry. He saw our misery, distress and oppression. ⁸ The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. ⁹ He has brought us to this place and has given us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰ So now, look! I have brought the first produce of the land, which You, O LORD, have given me.’ Then you shall set it down before the LORD, your God, and worship before the LORD, your God! ¹¹ Then you shall be glad about all the good things that the LORD, your God, has given to you and your family, together with the Levite and the foreigner who is living among you!

Romans 10:8b-13

^{8b} “The Word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.” This is the Word of faith, which we are preaching, ⁹ that if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart a person believes, so that he is counted righteous and with the mouth a person confesses and then he is saved. ¹¹ For the Scripture says, “The person who believes in Him will not be put to shame.” ¹² For there is no difference between Jew and Greek. For the same Lord is over them all and gives His riches to all who call on Him. ¹³ For “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Luke 4:1-13

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